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Children and armed conflict

Report of the Secretary-General**

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 21 of Security Council resolution 1314 (2000), the second Security Council resolution devoted specifically to children and armed conflict. My first report to the General Assembly and the Security Council on children and armed conflict (A/55/163-S/2000/712) addressed a broad range of issues of concern to children affected by armed conflict, and contained 55 specific recommendations. The present progress report on the implementation of resolution 1314 (2000) stipulates several important measures intended to protect children during and after armed conflict. The report also informs the Security Council of actions under way to ensure implementation of my earlier recommendations and the relevant Council resolutions, and highlights additional key actions that may be taken in the near future.

2. In the armed conflicts of recent years children have featured centrally as targets of violence and, occasionally, even unwillingly, as perpetrators of violence. A large number of children have been directly affected by armed conflict, many of them uprooted from their homes and communities, maimed or killed. Others have been made orphans, abducted, abused and exploited. Particularly damaging for future generations is the impact of war on girls. Disadvantaged in peacetime, girls undergo sexual abuse and enslavement during war. In addition, war indirectly affects many more children by destroying entire social networks and infrastructures. Malnutrition increases as a result of low food production, impeded access to services and displacement. Many resources for social services are diverted into the war effort. As health services deteriorate, infant and child mortality rates rise dramatically. The destruction of schools and the displacement of teachers reduces access to schooling and leaves children at risk of recruitment. Displacement also separates families and deprives children of a secure environment. These have become common features of today's conflicts; they deserve special attention and action.

3. In Angola, for example, 30 years of war, widespread poverty, internal displacement and decay in the provision of social services have led to a catastrophic humanitarian situation. Since the resurgence of war in 1998, some 3 million people have been internally displaced (25 per cent of the total population). In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the International Rescue Committee reports that, since the renewed outbreak of the fighting in August 1998, some 2.5 million deaths have occurred, above and

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** The footnote requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 54/248 was not included in the submission.

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beyond the million people who might have been expected to die otherwise. Seventy-five per cent of children born in the districts of Moba and Kalemie have died or will die before they reach the age of two.

4. In 1990, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (General Assembly resolution 44/25, annex), which provides an important normative framework for the protection of children affected by armed conflict, came into force. The world leaders who gathered at the 1990 World Summit for Children committed themselves to taking political action at the highest levels to protect children from the scourge of war and to take measures to prevent further armed conflicts.

5. Over the course of the ensuing decade, a number of actors have contributed to tangible progress in developing and advancing the agenda on children and armed conflict. I have reported on a number of those advances in my recent report to the General Assembly at its special session on children, entitled "We the children: end-decade review of the follow-up to the World Summit for Children" (A/S-27/3, paras. 341-361). Building on the momentum established at the Conference on War-Affected Children of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), held at Accra in April 2000 (see A/55/163-S/2000/712, para. 77), the International Conference on War-Affected Children, hosted by the Government of Canada, Winnipeg in September 2000, brought together 1,500 delegates from 130 countries and provided an important boost to our efforts on behalf of children affected by armed conflict. However, our growing awareness of the plight of war-affected children and increasing focus on their protection and rehabilitation have not yet, regrettably, ended children's suffering during and after armed conflict. We note commendable progress on many fronts and yet, to the children tormented by the effects of armed conflict, our efforts to bring about an "era of application" of protective norms and standards fall short both of their expectations and of universally agreed standards.

II. Consolidating the normative framework

6. Some 15 months after the General Assembly adopted the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, only 5 ratifications have been received — 5 short of the 10 required for this Protocol to enter into force. Eighty-one countries have signed, indicating their intention to proceed with ratification, and I urge them, and those countries that have not yet signed, to take the necessary steps without further delay. Moreover, only two of the five parties to the Protocol (Andorra, Sri Lanka) have set the minimum age for voluntary enlistment at 18, as I called upon Member States to do last year. The Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict have jointly addressed urgent appeals to a number of heads of State and Government, urging signature and/or ratification of the Optional Protocol.

7. I am pleased to note that 37 States have ratified the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, bringing closer to reality the possibility of prosecutions against individuals responsible for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.

8. The ILO Convention (No. 182) on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, which prohibits forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in hostilities, has been rapidly ratified; it entered into force on 19 November 2000 and currently has 173 States parties. As we mark the fiftieth anniversary of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, I would appeal to all Member States to ensure that attention is paid to the rights of refugee children, in accordance with both the 1951 Convention and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In addition, there have been 118 ratifications of the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction.

9. While the primary international legal responsibility to protect children affected by armed conflict falls to States, other parties to conflict also incur similarly important obligations vis-à-vis children affected by or living in areas of armed conflict. I have asked the Security Council to urge armed groups to commit themselves to the child protection standards embodied in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the optional protocols thereto, and in international humanitarian law, and to accept and cooperate in the monitoring of adherence to those standards (A/55/163-S/2000/712, recommendation 4). In addition, the United Nations system and intergovernmental actors should support local communities and civil society groups in their efforts to strengthen local norms that

have traditionally provided for child protection in time of war (ibid., recommendation 5).

Action points

1. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict is one of the core treaties that States are expected to ratify during the special session of the General Assembly on children. States are urged to take the necessary steps without further delay to sign and ratify the Optional Protocol.

2. States, in particular those considering the ratification of the Rome Statute, are urged to review their national legislation with a view to defining the crimes within the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court as national crimes and to ensure that national courts have jurisdiction over them and can prosecute egregious violations of children's rights in the context of armed conflict, wherever they occur.

III. Monitoring of obligations and commitments: eliciting compliance

10. The framework of international law and consequent obligations provide the foundation upon which international protection efforts must be based. The effective monitoring of adherence to that framework is in itself an essential action contributing to the protection of children and their rights.

A. Eliciting compliance with obligations and commitments

11. Over the past three years, my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF have worked with the United Nations missions and country teams to elicit commitments from the parties to various armed conflicts throughout the world, generating a series of child protection pledges from parties to conflict. My Special Representative, Olara A. Otunnu, has elicited 59 specific commitments from Governments and representatives of armed groups in several zones of conflict where children have suffered immensely.

12. For example, he visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo from 23 May to 3 June 2001, and there met President Joseph Kabila, the leaders of the Rassemblement congolais pour la démocratie (RCD), headed by Adolphe Onusumba, and the leaders of the Front pour la Libération du Congo (FLC), headed by Jean-Pierre Bemba. He proposed the following five-point programme of action for ending child soldiering in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which has been accepted by all political and military leaders:

(a) Halt the recruitment of children under the age of 18 and refrain from deploying child soldiers;

(b) Undertake joint visits (by the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC), UNICEF and military authorities) to military camps and barracks to ensure that children are not being used in war;

(c) Encourage public awareness campaigns to sensitize the military, civil society and local communities regarding child soldiers;

(d) Establish necessary programmes for reception and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers;

(e) Establish a mechanism to monitor and report on compliance with commitments set out above.

In addition, those leaders committed themselves to ensuring access to humanitarian assistance to all vulnerable populations, in particular children, and provided security guarantees for humanitarian personnel. It is hoped that parties to armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo will adhere to the commitments made to my Special Representative.

13. In several zones of conflict, important commitments made to my Special Representative and other relevant bodies have been met. The Government of Rwanda has enacted legislation that enables girls, including tens of thousands who became heads of households after the 1994 genocide, to inherit farms and other properties crucial to their survival. Prompted by the facilitator of the Arusha peace process, parties to armed conflict agreed to place issues pertaining to war-affected children on the agenda of the process and in the resulting accords. The Government of Colombia raised its age of recruitment into the armed forces to 18 and subsequently demobilized a number of under-age recruits. Parties to armed conflict in the Sudan have taken steps to improve humanitarian access to the

conflict zone. In Sierra Leone, the Government has met its commitment to establish a National Commission for War-Affected Children. Despite such instances of progress, however, children continue to be targeted in ongoing conflicts in Burundi, Sri Lanka and the Sudan and by guerrillas and militias in Colombia.

14. Experience has shown that concerted leadership by United Nations missions and agencies, in particular the United Nations country team on the ground and by non-governmental organizations in following up on these commitments through sustained advocacy and monitoring is vital to their success. Norms and commitments require compliance. Last year I called upon Member States to consider taking measures to make any political, diplomatic, financial, material and military assistance for State or non-State parties to conflict contingent on compliance with international standards that protect children in armed conflict. I reiterate my appeal to Member States to use their political, legislative and diplomatic leverage to help ensure that parties to conflict respect their child protection obligations and commitments.

B. Monitoring compliance with obligations and commitments

15. There is an urgent need to further expand and strengthen the impartial and credible reporting of compliance with international standards and with commitments given by parties to armed conflict to my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and concerned bodies. Such reporting can assist in exerting political pressure on parties whose conduct falls short of their child protection obligations or commitments.

16. The Security Council has been increasingly active in its call for improved monitoring and reporting of child protection concerns. For example, in its resolution 1355 (2001) on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Council specifies that child protection advisers deployed with MONUC should ensure consistent and systematic monitoring and reporting on the conduct of the parties to the conflict as concerns their child protection obligations under humanitarian and human rights law and the commitments they have made to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

17. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has worked the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to incorporate human rights monitoring into peacekeeping operations, including through child rights officers in the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) and MONUC. In addition, several Special Rapporteurs of the Commission on Human Rights are paying particular attention to children affected by armed conflict during their missions and in their reports; some of them have been able to brief the Security Council.

18. Among those taking up the call for improved monitoring is a group of international non-governmental organizations that are forming a "watchlist" to compile information and assess the performance of armed forces and groups on the basis of uniform criteria and continuous, field-based information-gathering.

19. Effective monitoring of and reporting on abuses of children's rights in wartime can have life-threatening implications for the staff on the ground, both international and national. The Security Council has therefore repeatedly called on parties to armed conflict to ensure safe and unhindered access to vulnerable populations, has strongly condemned attacks on the personnel of humanitarian organizations and has demanded that perpetrators be brought to justice.

20. The media can also play a role in drawing attention to the plight of children in armed conflict. In May 2001, 60 Angolan children were abducted by UNITA in Caxito Bengo Province, Angola. The documentation available on the abducted children — including their names, ages and photographs — enabled UNICEF and the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator in Angola to launch an international publicity campaign, which prompted UNITA to release the children to a Catholic Mission after 20 days.

21. Monitoring must, of course, be more than an end in itself. If monitoring efforts are intended to indicate and predict trends over time and if information available is to be used to inform the exercise of political will and the development of policy and programme efforts on behalf of children, then rigorous, credible, neutral and systematic monitoring must be ensured. Reliable monitoring and documentation of wartime abuses of children will also facilitate post-conflict efforts to expose the perpetrators of these

crimes and, where possible, bring them to justice. My Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict has proposed an autonomous "observatory", affiliated with an independent research institution, to monitor the conduct and compliance with commitments of parties to armed conflict.

Action points

3. The Security Council and Member States are called upon to continue to take steps to ensure compliance by all parties to armed conflicts with their child protection obligations and the commitments they have made to my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, as well as relevant United Nations bodies.

4. The Security Council may wish to ensure that the mandates of peace operations explicitly include provisions for the monitoring of the rights of children.

5. Accurate and current information about the protection of children's rights in situations of conflict from a wide variety of sources, including United Nations peace operations, country teams, and Special Rapporteurs, and non-governmental organizations, should be made available to the Security Council and Member States.

6. Regional organizations are called upon to institute mechanisms for monitoring and taking steps to curb the cross-border movement of individuals and groups credibly accused of having violated their child protection commitments and obligations.

IV. Child protection on the United Nations peace and security agenda

22. This year has seen heightened activism by both the General Assembly and the Security Council on behalf of children affected by armed conflict, which should include eliciting a strong outcome from the General Assembly at its special session on children.

A. The Security Council's heightened activism on behalf of children in armed conflict

23. Over the past year, the Security Council has continued to request, to receive and to respond to, information concerning the impact of armed conflict on children. I have undertaken to include an assessment of critical child protection concerns and corresponding recommendations in relevant reports to the Council. Consequently, over the course of this reporting period the Council has received pertinent information and/or recommendations in some 30 reports. Seven Security Council resolutions reflected a concern for child protection in time of armed conflict, as did several Security Council presidential statements and open debates. Moreover, in recognition of the association between armed conflict and deteriorating humanitarian conditions that dramatically affect children's mortality, the Council is receiving briefings by humanitarian agencies on the situation of children in countries and regions of concern to it. I urge the Council to consider such information regularly and, when appropriate, to take action to ensure that safe and unhindered humanitarian access to vulnerable populations is provided by parties to armed conflict.

24. The Security Council's engagement with the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo provides one example of its growing concern for child protection. Its call on all parties to armed conflict to immediately stop the recruitment and the use of child soldiers (resolution 1332 (2000)) led to the hand-over of 165 children from Bunia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, to UNICEF from a training camp in Uganda. This illustrates how Security Council resolutions can provide the leverage for agencies on the ground to address violations of children's rights. The members of the Council were also briefed by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Roberto Garretón, primarily on the issue of child soldiers both before and after the Council's visit to the country. In its resolution 1341 (2001), the Council requested that my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict oversee compliance with the demand that such children be demobilized speedily, returned and rehabilitated, and urged that he be dispatched to visit the region without delay. Subsequently the Security Council incorporated a number of concrete child protection elements into the renewed mandate of

MONUC in June 2001. Specifically, in its resolution 1355 (2001) it called upon all relevant parties to ensure that urgent child protection concerns were addressed in all national, bilateral and regional dialogues, and that child soldiers were expeditiously demobilized, and called upon Member States to ensure the resources required for long-term reintegration. The Security Council also called upon me to ensure sufficient deployment of child protection advisers, which were first authorized by the Council for UNAMSIL, within MONUC. Additional child protection advisers will soon be deployed to relieve the currently over-stretched child protection section of MONUC. I am grateful for the Security Council's continued commitment to resolution 1314 (2000), in which it reaffirmed its continued readiness to deploy child protection advisers as appropriate.

B. Integrating child protection into United Nations peacemaking and peacekeeping processes

1. Peacemaking processes

25. While much has been done to draw attention to the situation of children's rights and protection, it is important to examine the role that United Nations mediators, negotiators and heads of mission might play in addressing those issues during peace negotiations and in peace agreements.

26. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations is giving consistently high priority to the protection of children's rights. In a recent presentation to the Preparatory Committee for the Special Session of the General Assembly on Children, the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations proposed to build upon the progress made in this area by establishing an informal inter-agency working group to evaluate the lessons learned to date and to discuss how our efforts may be supported in the future, in particular at the peace negotiation stage, through the integration of child protection in peacemaking and peacekeeping processes. The proposed working group will fully take into account the operational procedures being developed by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, in collaboration and consultation with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and others, to clarify responsibilities for and facilitate the implementation of recent recommendations on the cross-cutting topic of the protection of civilians in armed conflict (see S/2001/614 and S/2001/712). These processes will work in unison to ensure that members of the Security Council are briefed on child protection concerns relevant to each country and issue included in the Council's agenda.

2. Peacekeeping operations

27. At present two peacekeeping missions — UNAMSIL in Sierra Leone and MONUC in the Democratic Republic of the Congo — have explicit child protection elements in their mandates and child protection advisers among their personnel in order to ensure the integration of these issues in the peacekeeping and peace-building processes.

28. The child protection adviser within UNAMSIL has helped to ensure that the Mission works actively with UNICEF, non-governmental organizations and others to ensure the protection of the rights of children affected by armed conflict, including the release of child combatants by the rebel movement and their subsequent transfer to UNICEF and child protection agencies. Since May 2001, a total of 1,214 children from the Revolutionary United Front, 646 from the Civil Defence Forces and 14 from the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council/Sierra Leone Army have been demobilized. These children have entered into the UNICEF-supported child protection programmes that provide emergency interim care, family tracing and reunification and also community-based reintegration. UNAMSIL has advocated the reconciliation and acceptance of children back into their communities. Similarly, my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, UNAMSIL and UNICEF have been involved in ensuring that the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission takes child protection concerns into account; they will also continue to take efforts to ensure respect for the rights of any child involved in the proceedings of the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

29. The United Nations operation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is engaged in similar efforts and activities in that country for the protection of children affected by armed conflict, including continuously monitoring the recruitment and facilitating the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers, a significant number of whom have reportedly been disarmed to date. In addition, MONUC will participate in a study to profile child soldiers in the

military camps, which should increase our knowledge about the impact of armed conflict on children and the requirements for their successful reintegration into society. MONUC has also been working closely with UNICEF, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and local non-governmental organizations on family reunification.

30. Several other peace operations are also taking important steps, in collaboration with UNICEF and other bodies, to advance the best interests of children within the scope of their mandates. The United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) provides technical assistance for humanitarian mine-action activities in the Temporary Security Zone, and the human rights component of the Mission investigates cross-border child protection issues, including discrimination, and the forced deportation or repatriation of families that can lead to separation of children from their parents. The United Nations Peace-building Support Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS) is verifying allegations of continued child recruitment into the army and is encouraging the Government to pay particular attention to the challenges facing children and women in post-conflict Guinea-Bissau. The United Nations Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (UNMIBH) and the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) are involved in the training of local juvenile justice administration officials.

31. The protection of children in armed conflict has thus been included in the peace and security agenda. With continued joint efforts and the support of Member States, efforts to address the needs of children in conflict and post-conflict situations will be further enhanced.

C. Ensuring the provision of child protection training and oversight for United Nations peacekeeping personnel

32. The United Nations system has advanced significantly towards the goal of ensuring that United Nations personnel involved in peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace-building activities have appropriate training in international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law, including child and gender-related provisions, as urged by the Security Council in its resolutions 1261 (1999), 1265 (1999) and 1296 (2000). Training on the rights of the child and child protection is now part of the curriculum of all the peacekeeping training activities conducted by the Training and Evaluation Service of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

33. In May 2001, the Office of my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, UNICEF and the Swedish non-governmental organization Rädda Barnen, in collaboration with the DPKO, convened an informal working group on child protection training for peacekeeping personnel, to produce a complete core training package on child rights and protection for use by all United Nations multidimensional peace operations. The package will be adapted to the evolving mandate and local context of each particular mission and will contain materials relevant to the staff complement of each mission (e.g. military observers, peacekeepers, civilian police, civil affairs, child protection, human rights and humanitarian affairs). Participants in the working group include representatives of key United Nations-system actors, international and regional organizations, Member States, non-governmental organizations and individual experts. Some peacekeeping operations, including UNMEE and MONUC, have already developed child protection training materials with assistance from UNICEF. A number of United Nations entities and non-governmental organizations have collaborated in the production of the Action for the Rights of Children training materials; all of these will contribute to the core package compiled by the working group.

34. Because peacekeeping and other personnel should also maximize their potential to advance the interests of children and civilians within the scope of the particular mission's mandate, the training package must be administered within a framework of continuous guidance and supervision within each peacekeeping and peace-building operation. Child protection advisers will have an important role to play in this regard. Furthermore, the child protection materials will form a core part of the materials used by the Training and Evaluation Service of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

35. These concrete steps to provide child protection training for United Nations peacekeeping personnel in no way diminish the continued validity of the recommendation made in my last report on children and armed conflict, in which I asked Member States to

ensure similarly appropriate training for all national troops and personnel involved in United Nations peacekeeping operations in advance of deployment to the mission area (A/55/163-S/2000/712, recommendation 36). UNICEF country offices and national committees, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and non-governmental organizations can be of assistance in this regard.

D. Child-conscious procedures for investigating possible misconduct attributed to peacekeeping personnel

36. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations has drawn up a Code of Conduct for United Nations peacekeepers, which includes clear instructions regarding the protection of children's rights and a zero tolerance policy of abuse. Should allegations be made against an officer, internal investigations are conducted and may result in repatriation and waiver of immunity if he or she is found guilty. The Department is also aware of the need for uniform child-conscious operating procedures in the event of alleged staff misconduct involving a child. Local people in the mission area should have a point of contact within the mission to whom suspected misconduct can be reported; clear reporting lines for staff must be established to ensure that cases of suspected misconduct are addressed; and child-conscious investigation guidelines must be established to avoid further harm to any child involved in alleged misconduct or abuse. The Department is currently reviewing the procedures for investigating cases of alleged misconduct and, in consultation with my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, will ensure that they include appropriate provisions for the investigation of alleged child abuse.

37. Last year, I recommended that the Security Council consider requesting troop-contributing States to inform the Secretariat on measures taken to investigate and prosecute members of their armed forces who are alleged to have violated international humanitarian law, including the rights of children (A/55/163-S/2000/712, recommendation 37). The action being taken within the Secretariat to reinforce standard operating procedures in cases of alleged violations of children's rights by peacekeeping staff is without prejudice to my request that Member States likewise contribute to the credibility and legitimacy of United Nations peacekeeping operations by conducting transparent follow-up to allegations of misconduct by their nationals acting under the United Nations flag.

E. Filling the knowledge gap to improve child protection within the peacekeeping context

38. Many of the policies and programmes intended to better protect children within the framework of the United Nations peacekeeping activities may be better informed by the efforts of a newly established international research network on children and armed conflict. That network was initially proposed and facilitated by my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and was launched in July 2001 in Florence, Italy, in collaboration with UNICEF, research institutions — the Social Science Research Council, the United Nations University of Peace and the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development — and non-governmental organizations, in particular International Save the Children Alliance and World Vision. It should soon begin to bring international expertise to bear on the assessment of and response to pressing child protection issues. In particular, members of the network will focus on identifying the trends in warfare that have made possible the targeting of children during armed conflict; precise data on the different aspects of the suffering of war-affected children; local norms and traditions relevant to the protection of children affected by armed conflict; and impact assessments from programme interventions on behalf of war-affected children. Reports and recommendations to the Security Council on child protection matters will in time reflect the extent to which the new initiative serves to increase our knowledge of the impact of armed conflict upon children and the ways in which key actors should best intervene or respond.

Action points

7. The work of the informal inter-agency working group on the integration of child protection concerns into peace negotiation and agreements should receive due attention and follow-up.

8. The training package developed by the informal working group on child protection training for peacekeeping personnel should form a core

component of training provided to peacekeeping personnel. Member States are called upon to take similar steps.

9. The Security Council may decide to continue to include child protection elements in the mandates of relevant peacekeeping operations, and to provide for child protection advisers and child-focused human rights officers where appropriate.

10. The launch of the international research network on children and armed conflict is commended and should be supported.

V. The impact on children of illicit exploitation of natural resources in zones of conflict

39. Illicit exploitation of natural resources by parties to armed conflict in war-affected areas adversely affects children by enabling parties to acquire the materials to continue the war and by diverting resources that should be feeding educational and social infrastructures. Reports indicate that children in many resource-rich conflict zones have been forced to work, mostly under terrible conditions, and have also been used as soldiers to protect mining and other extractive operations.

40. Parties to conflict rely on their ability to exploit local resources and market them abroad, sometimes with the assistance of neighbouring countries or the private sector. In sub-Saharan Africa, the illicit trade in diamonds has fuelled destructive civil wars in Angola, Liberia and Sierra Leone. In Colombia, vast tracts of fertile land have been converted from other crops to drugs to feed a lucrative trade that supports many of the parties to armed conflict in the country. The illicit trade in drugs also featured prominently in Afghanistan's incessant civil war, and continues to fuel civil conflict in Myanmar. In the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, parties to armed conflict have established sophisticated operations to exploit gold, diamonds, timber and coltan — an important resource in high-technology industries — and to export those resources illegally across the country's borders. Reports from both the United Nations and local and international non-governmental organizations attest to the scale of this plunder, and the resulting violations of children's rights.

41. Since my first report to the Security Council on children and armed conflict, the Council has started to take a number of significant steps to curb the impact on children of the exploitation of natural resources in zones of conflict by parties to armed conflict. In its resolution 1314 (2000), the Council expressed its grave concern at the linkages between illicit trade in natural resources and armed conflict and also expressed its intention to take appropriate steps. Expert groups established by the Council have studied the effectiveness of targeted sanctions aimed at curbing such illicit trade in Angola (see S/2000/203), as well as the impact of such trade on the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (see S/2001/357). In Sierra Leone, the Council has worked, through Member States, to encourage the diamond industry to establish a comprehensive system for tracking illicit diamonds (resolution 1306 (2000)), and has levied sanctions on one of Sierra Leone's neighbours complicit in that trade. With regard to Angola, the Monitoring Mechanism on Sanctions against UNITA established pursuant to resolution 1295 (2000) is considered to have been very effective in constraining the ability of UNITA to fuel its war through the sale of diamonds and its mandate has been extended (resolution 1348 (2001)).

42. Last year, I asked Member States to consider executive and legislative measures to discourage corporate actors within their jurisdiction from engaging in commercial activities with parties to armed conflict that engage in systematic violations of international child protection standards. Some Member States have taken laudable action to promote accountability among corporate actors in conflict situations. Efforts range from labelling products that come from conflict zones to promoting voluntary codes of conduct for businesses in conflict-ridden areas. Such codes of conduct could require the public disclosure of all investments, transactions or profits originating, concluding or involving actors based in countries embroiled in armed conflict. Member States with jurisdiction over those corporate actors could enact legislation requiring such transparency.

43. The explicit recommendations made in my last report, if fully implemented, would go a long way towards curbing the violation of children's rights caused by the illicit exploitation of natural resources in conflict areas (recommendations 7, 8, 10 and 38).

Further implementation of those recommendations is needed.

Action points

11. The Security Council may wish to continue to consider targeted measures against parties to armed conflict, including complicit neighbours, whose actions are contributing to the illegal exploitation of natural resources and the consequent fuelling of violent conflict in zones of conflict.

12. The Security Council may decide to continue its development of "strategic maps" of resource flows in zones of conflict characterized by egregious harm to children and civilians, focusing in particular on the beneficiaries of those flows and the supply chains whereby illegally procured resources are inserted into legal international markets. The Security Council is called upon to consider the inclusion, where feasible, of specific provisions in the mandates of peacekeeping operations to monitor such activity. In addition, the Security Council may wish to convene informal consultations with relevant actors, in particular with business leaders, on establishing mechanisms to curb those supply chains.

13. Multilateral development banks and the international corporate sector could conduct "child impact assessments", where feasible, with regard to particular investments and projects that they may be funding in or near zones of conflict. Such assessments will repay their own costs by leading to better relations with local communities and hence more viable investments.

VI. Child soldiers and abducted children

44. Thousands of children continue to be abducted to serve as soldiers, spies, messengers, servants and sexual slaves with armed forces and groups. Poverty, propaganda and ideology also continue to drive the involvement of children in many conflict areas.

45. One of the most alarming situations of this nature exists in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where all parties to the conflict have been recruiting children, in particular in the east, on a scale that has little historical precedent. In Timor, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) continues to trace children taken to other islands of Indonesia from the refugee camps in West Timor following the violence in 1999. The return of at least 200 children from Java has been obstructed until now by parties on the ground.

46. In West Africa, thousands of displaced and refugee children living in insecure border areas are susceptible to forced recruitment, as demonstrated recently by the deteriorating situation in the Mano River area. In Liberia, where the humanitarian situation in Lofa County has deteriorated, children who recently returned from Guinea are reportedly being forcibly taken from their terrified parents and recruited as soldiers from displaced persons camps in border areas. Sierra Leoneans fleeing war at home found themselves in an even less secure situation in Guinea. Children in refugee camps in Guinea have been at risk of recruitment — armed groups reportedly enter at will and remove boys under the age of 18.

47. Efforts to gain the release of children abducted in northern Uganda, and often taken to the Sudan, have yielded little or no dividend. Escape is the only, very risky, recourse for those children and it has proved successful for less than 200 children over the course of the past year. Escapees often perish during their flight or are recaptured and subjected to other forms of abuse by their captors. In fact the fate of thousands of abducted children remains unknown. In March this year, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights conducted an assessment mission to the Sudan and Uganda, with the participation of UNICEF and the Office of my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict.

A. Prevention: addressing root causes and preventing cross-border abduction and trafficking

48. Efforts to stem the use of children as soldiers must focus on the root causes of child recruitment and on the conduct of the recruiters. Cross-border and region-wide monitoring may be required in many instances if one intended to map and track the phenomenon adequately. A strong political message must be sent to all those responsible both for the abductions and for the circumstances in which they are able to occur.

49. The international community should continue to promote the revival and strengthening of local norms and value systems that protect children; the prosecution of child recruiters by local, national and international justice systems; the improvement of educational and vocational opportunities for young people; and the continuous efforts to reduce poverty and involve young people in the reconstruction and development of their communities. Communities in the conflict-affected areas need to be directly involved in those efforts, as local resources and knowledge are often crucial for the sustainability of programme interventions on behalf of war-affected children.

B. Demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers

50. The General Assembly and the Security Council have on many occasions concurred that the demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers must be integrated into any peace negotiation and resulting peace agreement, as well as dealt with during the conflict itself. Recruitment of children is a violation of their rights and must not await peace talks before it is addressed. Successful demobilization and reintegration can help to prevent continuing cycles of violence. Child soldier demobilization and reintegration during and after conflict continues to be a complex and challenging process and the humanitarian community continues to seek to integrate lessons learned from the demobilization and reintegration processes in Cambodia, El Salvador, Liberia, Mozambique, Rwanda and other conflict zones. The Council has rightly appealed to parties to armed conflict to ensure expeditious demobilization and reintegration, and also to Member States to ensure adequate and sustained resources for long-term reintegration. Yet among the key challenges for the agencies and donors attempting to plan an appropriate demobilization and reintegration programme for child soldiers is the daunting lack of basic information on the key characteristics of the children to be demobilized and the best means to ensure their reintegration. Among the initial lessons learned from the demobilization and reintegration programme built into the 1999 Lomé Peace Agreement in Sierra Leone is that such efforts should be characterized by a distinct demobilization and reintegration process for children within the framework of the broader programme for all combatants, a focus on the reintegration of children into their communities of origin, and support for existing cultural values and mechanisms such as traditional healing, community mediation and reconciliation.

51. The particular situation of girls continues to require advocacy and new approaches. As disarmament and demobilization programmes are implemented, it is difficult to identify and gain access to women and girls who may have been abducted and taken as "wives" or dependants of the combatants. These women, girls and their children, often referred to as "camp followers", move from place to place with their abductors, perpetuating a cycle of dependence. In Sierra Leone, a special orientation programme has been developed for women accompanying the combatants to provide information on reproductive health, sexual violence, family tracing, skills training and other subjects. It is hoped that this will encourage abductees to come forward. Support programmes are in place for girls under 18 and their children identified through these efforts, but there continues to be a gap in support to victims over the age of 18 because of the absence of appropriately targeted programmes.

C. Demobilization and reintegration in the midst of conflict: avoiding the risk of re-recruitment

52. Recent efforts to demobilize child soldiers in the midst of conflict have been undertaken in Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, and the Sudan. Such efforts are crucial: demobilization of children is a necessity that cannot be held hostage to political developments. In each instance, prevention of re-recruitment or re-enlistment has been an overwhelming concern. Such prevention cannot occur, however, without putting into place adequately resourced structures and programmes for receiving demobilized child combatants and ensuring their sustainable rehabilitation.

53. A revived economic infrastructure with opportunities for youth can be crucial to the immediate success of a demobilization and reintegration programme. Armed conflicts offer economic opportunities that can entice children to enlist as soldiers, generating a cycle that can only be broken by viable economic alternatives. Demobilized Liberian child soldiers who lacked productive skills or found

their skills unmarketable in a shattered economy were quickly re-absorbed into fighting forces in the region and elsewhere or employed in the illicit exploitation and trafficking of minerals and resources. Former child soldiers are at higher risk of being re-recruited than other children because they are already trained. What is required is a long-term perspective and adequate resources to prevent re-recruitment, combined with an understanding of the local perceptions of former combatants.

54. Children separated from their families are at extreme risk for recruitment or re-recruitment into armed forces and groups. UNHCR, UNICEF, ICRC and a number of non-governmental organizations have launched efforts in conflict zones to prevent separations, quickly identify separated children and reunite them with their families in a timely manner. Such programmes are hampered by ongoing violence, however, as the killing of six ICRC workers last April has shown. The extent of continuing recruitment means that, even after efforts to reunite these children with their families and rehabilitate them, they are at the risk of re-recruitment. There have been numerous reports of children being recruited and abducted in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, taken to neighbouring countries for training and then brought back to fight in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Some have reportedly been abducted from the streets of neighbouring countries.

55. Successful demobilization and reintegration is acknowledged as a key determinant of future stability and demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers features prominently among the concerns of policy makers and programme implementers. However, it remains for the parties to the conflict to desist from recruiting, to ensure access to existing child soldiers, and to refrain from re-recruiting demobilized children. Only then can the international community advance with demobilization and reintegration programmes on the scale necessary to ensure successful family reunification and reintegration to civilian life for the many thousands of children believed fighting today.

Action points

14. Given the centrality of demobilization and reintegration programming to breaking the cycle of violence for children, the provision of adequate resources for such programming is crucial. The Security Council and Member States are urged to provide sustained and adequate resources to all relevant actors, in particular peace operations, United Nations entities and non-governmental organizations, engaged in implementing demobilization and reintegration programmes for children.

15. Regional organizations and relevant bodies are encouraged to institute close and consistent mapping of cross-border activity pertaining to the recruitment and abduction of children and to prioritize on their agendas the curbing of such activity.

VII. HIV/AIDS, children and conflict

56. Armed conflict facilitates the spread and aggravates the impact of HIV/AIDS. Many of the countries most affected by HIV/AIDS are currently in situations of conflict or are hosting large numbers of refugees. The ways in which HIV spreads in situations of conflict include sexual violence perpetrated by government and rebel forces; economic desperation that forces women and children to engage in sex for survival; and mass displacement into refugee and internally displaced camps where crowding, unsafe camp structures, violence and high levels of sexual activity exacerbate the spread of the virus. Recent trends in warfare have seen rape used as a strategic weapon. In addition, sexual exploitation of girls and women increases during times of conflict. According to MONUC, in one village in Kivu, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2,000 out of a population of 30,000 displaced persons are women victims of rape. At the same time, conflict inhibits responses to HIV/AIDS by breaking down communication, health and education systems that support HIV prevention, care and treatment and by impeding the realization of the human rights of certain groups and individuals.

57. In January 2000, the Security Council discussed AIDS in Africa as a threat to international peace and security, highlighting the devastating impact of AIDS, where entire communities are left without teachers, farmers or health providers, and children are orphaned and left to fend for themselves. Subsequently, in its resolution 1308 (2000), the Council explicitly recognized that the HIV/AIDS pandemic was exacerbated by armed conflict. The Council also urged Member States to consider voluntary HIV/AIDS testing and counselling for troops to be deployed in

peacekeeping operations, and expressed concern at the potentially damaging impact of HIV/AIDS on the health of international peacekeeping personnel. In response to the resolution, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations collaborated with the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) to issue HIV/AIDS awareness cards for peacekeepers. The core child protection training package (see para. 33) will include education and training on HIV/AIDS prevention for all peacekeeping personnel. Member States have been already requested to undertake such training prior to deployment when possible and to encourage military-to-military training on HIV/AIDS prior to deployment.

58. In addition to those efforts to create an international framework on the issue, networks have been developed for collaboration between government ministries, civil society and United Nations entities. The 1996 guidelines for HIV interventions in emergency settings have been revised, and several other practical guidelines have been developed by UNHCR, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Civil-Military Alliance to Combat HIV and AIDS. Commendable efforts have been made in some regions by United Nations entities and non-governmental organizations to reduce sexual violence and the economic vulnerability of displaced populations, provide AIDS education in schools, screen blood, strengthen community support for orphans, distribute condoms, and provide voluntary and confidential testing and counselling.

59. Some problems, however, persist. Governments, for the most part, are not extending strategic national plans on HIV/AIDS to areas of conflict. Humanitarian non-governmental organizations often do not have the capacity or training to work on HIV prevention and care and AIDS non-governmental organizations are not sufficiently involved in conflict areas. Interventions that are known to be effective in non-conflict settings, such as sexual education for young persons and prevention of mother-to-child transmissions, are often missing in zones of conflict. Similarly, programmes to reduce levels of stigma and discrimination faced by people living with, orphaned or made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS are rare, thus inhibiting willingness to seek out voluntary and confidential counselling and testing.

60. HIV education has been undertaken in the context of demobilization in some regions, but not in others. Refugees International reports that HIV/AIDS education is almost non-existent in demobilization, disarmament, reintegration and repatriation programmes in Sierra Leone. In Ethiopia, 55,000 troops were demobilized within the past year, but were given only two hours of HIV education, not sufficient to affect behaviour change. Demobilization of troops presents an organized opportunity to intervene, before troops disperse and return to their families.

Action points

16. Future Security Council field missions may decide to include an assessment of the HIV/AIDS situation, with particular focus on the impact of that situation on children.

17. I appeal to the Security Council, Member States, humanitarian organizations and donors to mainstream HIV/AIDS awareness, prevention, care and support into emergency humanitarian assistance and demobilization, disarmament, reintegration and repatriation programmes, including those for male and female child soldiers. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations will be encouraged to continue to provide appropriate guidance and support to peacekeeping personnel, and humanitarian agencies are urged to do the same for their personnel.

18. I urge that sexual violence against women and children continue to be prosecuted as a war crime in domestic and international forums. The spread of a practice that degrades women and children, increases the spread of HIV, and thus destabilizes regions for future generations cannot be tolerated.

VIII. Addressing impunity and redressing abuse: the involvement and protection of children in truth- and justice-seeking processes

61. In recent years the Security Council has called on parties to conflict to respect applicable international humanitarian and human rights law, stressed the obligation of States to prosecute those responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, and vigorously denounced the institutionalization of impunity through amnesty legislation and provisions (resolution 1314 (2000)). The Council has committed

itself to acting in response to egregious violations of international humanitarian law as applicable to children, and to ensure accountability for serious crimes in particular conflict areas. In 1999 and 2000, the Council reaffirmed its readiness to consider appropriate responses whenever civilian populations, or buildings or sites that usually had a significant presence of children, were targeted in situations of armed conflict, in violation of international law (resolutions 1261 (1999) and 1314 (2000)). Most recently, the Council stressed that those responsible for violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, including massacres and atrocities, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo would be held accountable (resolution 1355 (2001)).

62. Member States, the United Nations system and many international non-governmental organizations now explicitly agree that, to help construct a foundation for post-conflict peace and stability, and to begin to redress the suffering of the victims, those responsible for war crimes and other grave abuses must be exposed, held individually accountable and, if possible or appropriate, punished for their actions. Moreover, mechanisms intended to reveal truth and impart justice should contribute to the design of reparation programmes for victims and structural reforms to ensure that such events do not recur. The international community and concerned States must consider which processes or mechanisms might be best suited to achieve those outcomes. When children are involved as victims, witnesses or perpetrators of such terrible crimes, very special consideration must be given to the manner in which their experiences are documented and portrayed; whether the children themselves may be involved in truth- and justice-seeking processes; and what redress those processes may bring for traumatized children, their families and societies.

63. The Security Council's commitment to combating impunity for egregious abuse of children's rights in the context of armed conflict has been most visible this past year in the case of Sierra Leone. At the request of the Security Council, a Special Court for Sierra Leone, which will seek to prosecute those bearing the greatest responsibility for crimes against humanity and war crimes, including those involving children, is being established by agreement between the United Nations and the Government of Sierra Leone (resolution 1315 (2000)). A Truth and Reconciliation Commission, called for by the Lomé Peace Agreement of 1999, is being formed; it will seek to establish a historical record of egregious human rights violations during the conflict, and pay particular attention to the experiences of children. Previous and existing truth commissions or war crimes tribunals have not directly addressed those experiences.

64. In August 2000, as drafting commenced on an agreement with the Government of Sierra Leone to create the Special Court, it became apparent that the way in which the Court's statute would address gross abuses perpetrated against and by children would be a matter of contention and international concern. The Security Council strongly endorsed the proposal that the Court be empowered to prosecute the war crime of recruitment or use of children under the age of 15 by armed forces or groups. The Special Court should help to consolidate consensus on the definition of the war crime of recruitment in international criminal law. Moreover, the prosecution of those who recruit children should highlight the complexities of the issues regarding the use of children as soldiers and, ideally, deter such criminal conduct in the future.

65. International organizations, child rights advocates and non-governmental organizations disagreed, however, on whether, and how, children who participated in the commission of war crimes while serving with armed groups should be dealt with in judicial proceedings. The possible prosecution of children, and young adults who were children at the time of the crime, brought the issues of culpability, justice and impunity, and of individual and social healing, into focus for the national and international community and compelled an important debate.

66. The Security Council, after much deliberation and consultation, agreed that, should any person who was between 15 and 18 years of age at the time of the alleged commission of the crime come before the Court, he or she should be treated with dignity and a sense of worth and in accordance with international human rights standards. In the disposition of the case, imprisonment shall not be an option, but rather the Court shall determine which alternative programme or service is most appropriate. The parameters of juvenile justice have thus been retained. Members of the Council also noted that prosecutions of juveniles were extremely unlikely, and encouraged other institutions such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to develop specific provisions related to juvenile

offenders and victims (see S/2000/1234 and S/2001/95). While it is explicitly agreed that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission will play an important role in the case of juvenile offenders in Sierra Leone, there is no precedent to follow to ensure that those children will avail themselves of, or benefit from, the voluntary procedures of the Commission. To address that issue, a technical meeting on children and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was organized by UNICEF, UNAMSIL and the National Forum for Human Rights at Freetown, from 4 to 6 June 2001, to develop guidelines and special procedures for the involvement and protection of children in the work of the Commission. The report will be submitted for consideration by the commissioners and will be made available to the members of the Council. Both the Special Court and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission will require adequate resources to ensure that all children are involved in appropriate and helpful ways in their proceedings, that appropriate expert staff are retained and that all Truth and Reconciliation Commission personnel working with children or their families are appropriately trained and supervised.

67. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Special Court have distinct but mutually supporting functions and both should help to achieve accountability and to shed light on the context in which the most serious crimes have been perpetrated against, and sometimes by, children in Sierra Leone. Recent events have revealed, however, that little is known at the international level about the ways in which juvenile justice or truth-telling procedures can help to heal children exposed to or involved in armed conflict. The Office of my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, UNICEF, non-governmental organizations and individual experts are joining forces to address the outstanding questions in need of urgent attention if the positive potential of truth commissions and war crimes tribunals is to be harnessed for the benefit of war-affected children in Sierra Leone and elsewhere.

68. In East Timor, a Truth, Reception and Reconciliation Commission has been established and is expected to begin its work late in 2001. The Commission should facilitate community reconciliation agreements for those who committed less serious offences, while serious crimes, including murder, rape and organizing violence, will remain the jurisdiction of the formal justice system. The Commission will indeed inquire into violations against children and can be expected to make specific recommendations on children to the Government. Children should also benefit from the process of community reconciliation.

Action points

19. Attention is called to the recommendations recently made in the Security Council on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, in which both the Council and the General Assembly were urged to provide sufficient and sustained funding for international truth- and justice-seeking efforts, and to provide for such efforts within the mandates of peacekeeping mandates.

20. Member States, parties to armed conflict and other concerned actors are called upon to ensure that the truth- and justice-seeking processes envisaged in the aftermath of conflict pay systematic attention to the full range of children's war-time experiences, the circumstances that allowed such abuses to occur and the long-term interventions required to ensure rehabilitation and reintegration.

IX. Peace-building for children during and after conflict

69. The challenge and the costs of ensuring sustained access to health care, schooling and vocational training and future employment opportunities for children and youth in a conflict or post-conflict situation cannot be overstated. The failure to address those concerns as early as possible during an armed conflict, and subsequently during the peacemaking process, and the lack of resources to implement any child protection provisions in a peace agreement can generate future cycles of violence and instability.

70. An important element of an appropriate post-conflict response is the strengthening of local capacity to address post-conflict child protection concerns. Areas in which local capacity is crucial to ensuring sustainable child protection include child rights law and policy reform, strengthening of the juvenile justice and child welfare systems, and the psychosocial recovery of children exposed to armed conflict. Such efforts could be successfully marshalled through the formation, with international facilitation, of local and national commissions or committees that can articulate

and advance the relevant issues at all appropriate times. UNMIBH is monitoring and providing training for local police officials to address the trafficking of children for forced prostitution, inadequate police response to reports of domestic abuse involving children, and inadequate protection of children in police custody, detention facilities and prisons. After the 1998-1999 civil war in Guinea-Bissau, UNOGBIS encouraged the Government to create an Institute for Children and Women. The Institute is taking a leading role in drawing attention to post-conflict concerns of children and women, including prostitution, HIV/AIDS, the care of war orphans and the lack of educational and vocational opportunities for youth.

71. The manner in which wars are brought to a close can have lasting implications for peace and stability and for the well-being of children. Amnesties, truth commissions and judicial remedies for war-time abuses, typically negotiated during peace processes, all affect the mental health of children and their caretakers, with potentially volatile implications for generations to come. Failure to comply with the Security Council's call for an end to impunity for egregious war crimes can indeed have long-term implications for social reconciliation and stability. A broad amnesty adopted by peacemakers in the Republic of the Congo in 1999 precluded any prosecutions for war crimes, including against women and children. The United Nations country team in the Republic of the Congo notes a heightened sense of trauma and helplessness among victims living amid their war-time abusers. The long-term volatility of victims' mistrust of the judicial system, fear of their aggressors and lack of a venue within which to give voice to the injustices they have suffered should not be underestimated.

72. The Security Council has expressed its concern for continued access to basic social services during conflict and post-conflict periods (resolution 1314 (2000)). In armed conflict settings, education programmes can offer structure, stability and continuity for children and their communities. In addition, educational opportunities can mitigate the risk of enlistment or forced recruitment of children under 18 years of age, and can help to smooth the transition to civilian life for former child soldiers. Clearly such programmes must seek to include and address the concerns of girls. Educational programmes can help introduce awareness of HIV/AIDS prevention, child rights protection and advocacy and landmines. In Sierra Leone, for example, a Community Education Investment Programme has been developed by UNICEF to provide reintegration assistance for former child combatants in a manner that benefits the community and not just the individual child or family. Packages of teaching, learning and recreation supplies are provided to schools for each former child combatant enrolled in the school. The supplies are utilized by all students and teachers in the school, and reduce resentment that may develop when preferential treatment is given to only a few, thus helping to create a welcoming environment for the ex-child combatants.

73. Given the importance of such assistance, the Panel on United Nations Peacekeeping Operations proposed that heads of United Nations peace operations have flexibility to fund quick impact projects that make a real difference in the lives of people in the mission area. Though a fraction of the overall investment by the United Nations country team, UNMEE is the first peace operation to incorporate quick impact project funding into its budget and has already approved 50 infrastructure rebuilding projects focusing largely on health care and school repairs.

74. Some national health and education systems, as in Liberia, have fallen into decay over decades of strife and neglect, but others suffer the effects of lingering tensions, unresolved feuds and lack of donor confidence or commitment long after the fighting stops. Sometimes the messages conveyed under the guise of schooling can keep the fires of intolerance and resentment smouldering. UNMEE is currently producing a report on discriminatory practices that deny access to health care and schooling in both Eritrea and Ethiopia.

75. In addition, flows of small arms can significantly jeopardize peace-building efforts. In the last 12 months there have been a number of international initiatives to address the human cost of the uncontrolled trade in small arms and light weapons. United Nations humanitarian agencies as well as numerous international non-governmental organizations have joined efforts to document and remedy the fact that the presence and use of such arms have killed and disabled the most vulnerable civilians, in particular children and women, and facilitated the recruitment and use of children as soldiers. The United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects was held in New York from 9 to 20 July 2001. The Conference served a number of important

functions, two of which bear direct relevance to children affected by armed conflict. It offered an opportunity to build awareness among a broad range of actors on the nexus between small arms and the adverse impact of armed conflict on children, and it served as a first step to address the issue at a global level. I would like to encourage Member States to continue to work on the issues that are especially important to the protection of children in the context of the proliferation of small arms.

76. Peace-building for children must begin at the earliest feasible point in an armed conflict situation. Peacemakers must ensure that child-conscious institutional strengthening efforts are provided for during peace negotiations, and the international community must help to ensure adequate and sustained resource allocation.

Action points

21. The Security Council and Member States are urged to consider specific means of involving local communities in war-affected areas in the development and implementation of the post-conflict response, in particular those aspects that pertain to the rehabilitation of children affected by armed conflict.

22. Member States are called upon to establish codes of conduct to improve restraints on the transfer of small arms and light weapons, in particular to conflict zones where children's rights are violated and they are used as soldiers. The Security Council may wish to promote a culture of peace, including through support for peace education programmes and other non-violent approaches to conflict resolution, in its peace-building activities.

X. Regional responses to child protection concerns

77. Although most of today's conflicts are defined as internal, almost all have regional implications, with the involvement of neighbouring countries. Abuses that have cross-border parameters such as the recruitment and abduction of children for use as soldiers, prostitutes and slaves require regional and subregional solutions.

78. In April 2001, ECOWAS concluded an agreement to establish its Child Protection Unit with initial support from the Government of Canada. The Unit will ensure the integration of child protection mechanisms into all relevant ECOWAS institutions. It will also advocate and facilitate the full implementation of the Accra Declaration and Plan of Action on War-Affected Children agreed upon by ECOWAS, and other regional and international instruments on the rights of the child.

79. The Pan African Forum on Children, held in May 2001 under the auspices of the Organization of African Unity at Cairo, adopted a Declaration and Plan of Action that foresees special measures for the protection of children affected by armed conflict. The Organization of African Unity is intensifying its efforts to promote adherence to and implementation of the Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the African Child.

80. In recognition of the need for a regional approach to child protection in the Great Lakes region of Africa, the Security Council called for the inclusion of child protection issues in the agendas of all bilateral, regional and international dialogues in the region (resolution 1355 (2001)). My Special Representative is working closely with my Special Envoy for the Great Lakes region to ensure that child protection issues are given prominence in the agenda of the proposed conference for the region. However, the lack of a subregional institution in the Great Lakes has been a drawback in efforts to build momentum for this process. The onus is on the United Nations to create and sustain the necessary political environment to develop a "neighbourhood" child protection initiative that can be systematically implemented in the subregion. UNICEF offices in the region and the child protection advisers in MONUC have developed a regional strategy to prevent the cross-border recruitment of child soldiers and collaborate closely in demobilization and reintegration efforts. Through their combined efforts, a significant number of child soldiers have been demobilized in the Great Lakes region in 2000.

81. During the fourth high-level meeting between the United Nations and regional organizations in February 2001, I sought to foster collaboration between the United Nations and regional organizations to promote a comprehensive approach to peace-building, which must include a regional approach to child protection.

82. In its resolution 1314 (2000), the Security Council called on regional organizations to take specific actions to protect children affected by armed conflict in their various regions. However, the human and financial capacity of many of those organizations to implement and sustain such initiatives is severely limited. It is important that the United Nations and the donor community ensure sufficient levels of technical and financial assistance to regional organizations demonstrating the political will to address child protection issues during and after armed conflict, but which do not have the means to do so.

Action point

23. Member States are urged to provide the technical support and resources necessary for regional organizations to fulfil their roles in the protection of children in situations of armed conflict.

XI. Concluding observations

83. Existing normative standards, including previous Security Council resolutions, have gone a long way towards defining the parameters of acceptable conduct for parties to armed conflict as far as children and other civilians are concerned. Member States, the United Nations system and regional organizations have all been bound or solicited to take concrete steps to improve the protection of war-affected children. I have sought in the present report to describe progress made in the implementation of existing Security Council resolutions and identify areas where further action is needed. As delegations gather for the special session of the General Assembly on children, I sincerely hope that Member States, the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations, civil society and others will take decisive action to protect children and to actively dissuade, and seek to expose and sanction, those whose actions are beyond the pale. This is a matter of international cooperation and political will, and it is my hope that concrete commitments will be made by the Security Council and Member States such that all parties to armed conflict, and actors whose conduct indirectly fuels conflict, cannot but realize that the international community will accept nothing less than full compliance with child protection obligations and commitments in time of war and in its aftermath.